



Gandhian Sarvodaya movement transformed into recent Swachh Bharat and make in India

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Abstract: The world is beset with many natural and social problems especially environmental degradation, global warming, climate change, pollution and access to clean water are some of the gravest challenges placed before the world today. The deep ecology and the conservation of mother earth have become the catchwords for environmentalists all over the world. The first global environment protective measures were taken in Stockholm Declaration in 1972. In this conference the global environmental issues were discussed with implications for appropriate policies to be pursued by 178 nations. The other International Declarations like Rio Declaration of 1992, Johannesburg Declaration of 2002 and Rio Declaration of 2012 are concerned to the protection of Flora and Fauna which is centric of survival of mankind in sustainable manner. Gandhi's philosophy of life provides a sustainable development paradigm which is symbiotic with nature and ecosystem. He was deeply concerned with all problems confronted by humanity, and it was quite natural that he expressed his apprehension on matters relating to ecology and environment.

Key words: philosophy, Vasundhara, Vasumati,

Introduction:

Sanitation is more important than independence. He made cleanliness and sanitation an integral part of the Gandhian way of living. His mission was total sanitation for all.
- Mahatma Gandhi

Cleanliness is Godliness is the mantra of Mahatma Gandhiji, Father of Nation. He demonstrated, propagated and insisted for individual and community cleanliness throughout his life. The Government of India has launched Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on 2/10/2014 with a vision to dedicate Clean India on 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 2/10/2019. Mahatma Gandhi Swachhata Mission is integrated with Swachh Bharat Abhiyan towards realizing this laudable vision. Oct., 2019 to mark the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the

Nation. Cleanliness was very dear to Mahatma Gandhi. He had said that cleanliness is next to Godliness and that sanitation was more important than political freedom.

Importance of Cleanliness:

Indians gained freedom under the leadership of Gandhiji, but his dream of a clean India is still unfulfilled. Mahatma Gandhi said "Sanitation is more important than independence". He made cleanliness and sanitation an integral part of the Gandhian way of living. His dream was total sanitation for all.



Cleanliness is most important for physical well-being and a healthy environment. It has bearing on public and personal hygiene. It is essential for everyone to learn about cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation and the various diseases that are caused due to poor hygienic conditions. The habits learnt at a young age get embedded into one's personality. In some countries spitting on the road is a criminal offence. Those who spit after chewing betel leaves and tobacco have no consideration for the feelings of others. Spittle, mucus from the nose, etc, should also be covered with earth. (*Navajivan* dated 2 November, 1919).

Influence of his family & the West:

The Gandhi family was well known in Rajkot. His father and grandfather served as *dewans* (Prime Minister) in Rajkot and other neighbouring states. Being a Prime Minister's son and a barrister to boot, he must have needed guts to go round the town for a house to house inspection of the drains. Gandhi seldom failed to show moral courage when necessary. I, therefore, believe in the absolute necessity of a clean place for answering the call of nature and clean articles for use at the time. I have accustomed myself to them and wish that all others should do the same. The habit has become so firm in me that even if I wished to change it I would not be able to do so. Nor do I wish to change it" (*Navajivan* on 24 May, 1925).

Scavenging started from South Africa:

Gandhi learnt scavenging in South Africa. His friends there lovingly called him the great scavenger. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Everyone must be his own scavenger." After a three-years stay in

South Africa, he returned to India to fetch his wife and sons. Plague had broken out in the Bombay Presidency at that time. There was a chance of it spreading to Rajkot. Gandhi immediately offered his service for improving the sanitation of Rajkot.

Training of Cleanliness for Equality:

During Gandhiji's second trip to India from South Africa, he attended the Congress session in Calcutta to plead the cause of the ill-treated Indians in South Africa. The sanitary condition of the Congress camp was horrible. Some delegates used the veranda in front of their room as latrines, others did not object to it. Gandhi reacted immediately. When he spoke to the volunteers, they said; "This is not our job, this is a sweeper's job." Gandhi asked for a broom and cleaned the filth. He was then dressed in western clothes. The volunteers were astonished but none came forward to assist him. Years later, when Gandhi became the guiding star of the Indian National Congress, volunteers formed a *bhangi* (sweeper) squad in the Congress camps where for once the Brahmins worked as *bhangis*.

Use of Media to Create Awareness on Cleanliness:

In South Africa the whites despised the Indians for their slovenly habits. Gandhi inspected their quarters and asked them to keep their homes and surroundings clean. He spoke about it at public meetings and wrote in newspapers. Gandhi's house in Durban was built in western fashion. The bathroom had no outlet for water. Commodes and chamber-pot used by his clerks residing with him had to be cleaned. He compelled his wife Kasturba to do the same. He also taught his young sons this work.



Kasturba once expressed her disgust when asked to carry the chamber-pot used by his caste clerks. Gandhi rebuked her and told her to leave the house if she wanted to observe caste bias. He was once socially boycotted by his own sympathizers for admitting an untouchable couple to the Sabarmati Ashram.

Mass Contact Programme:

Gandhi's group launched a mass contact programme in the villages. "At the end of the morning's march," writes Tendulkar, "a batch of men and women from his party visited the *Harijan* quarters of the village near the camp, taking with them brooms and spades." They talked about the "necessity of sanitation, about keeping their yards clean, of burying rubbish, instead of leaving it to blow here and there.

Need for Cleanliness Everywhere:

After twenty years stay in that alien land, Gandhi, at 46, finally returned to India with his group. During his visit to Kumbh Mela at Hardwar that year, he with his Phoenix boys served as *bhangis* at the mela.

Responsibility of People towards Cleanliness to protect the Environment:

- Gandhiji said, "So long as you do not take the broom and the bucket in your hands, you cannot make your towns and cities clean."
- When he inspected a model school, he told the teachers: "You will make your institution ideal, if besides giving the students literary education, you have made cooks and sweepers of them."
- To the students his advice was, "If you become your own scavengers, you will make your surroundings

clean. It needs no less courage to become an expert scavenger than to win a Victoria Cross."

- The villagers near his ashram refused to cover excreta with earth. They said: "Surely this is *bhangi's* work. It is sinful to look at faces, more so to throw earth on them". Gandhi personally supervised the scavenging work in villages. To set an example, he for some months, himself used to go to the villages with a bucket and a broom. Friends and guests went with him. They brought bucketfuls of dirt and stool and buried them in pits.
- All scavenging work in his ashram was done by the inmates. Gandhi guided them. People of different races, religions and colours lived there.
- No dirt could be found anywhere on the ashram ground. All rubbish was buried in pits peelings of vegetables and left-over food was dumped in a separate manure pit. The night-soil, too, was buried and later used as manure. Waste water was used for gardening. The farm was free from flies and stink though there was no *puckka* drainage system.
- Gandhi and his co-workers undertook sweeper's work by turns. He introduced bucket-latrines and bicameral trench latrines. Gandhi showed this new innovation to all visitors with pride; rich and poor, leaders and workers, Indians and foreigners all had to use these latrines. This experiment slowly removed a version for scavenging from the minds of orthodox co-workers and women inmates of the ashram.



- The sight of a *bhangi* carrying a night-soil basket on his/her head made him sick. He explained how with the use of proper instruments, cleaning could be done neatly. Scavenging is a fine art and he did it without becoming filthy himself.
- He wrote, "Village tanks are promiscuously used for bathing, washing clothes and drinking and cooking purposes. Many village tanks are also used by cattle. Buffaloes are often seen wallowing in them. The wonder is that, in spite of this sinful misuse of village tanks, villages have not been destroyed by epidemics. Medical evidence shows that lack of pure water supply in villages is responsible for many of the diseases suffered by the villagers." (*Hairy*, 8 February, 1935)

We can conclude that cleanliness is important in our life as well as for the nation. It is well known that the Mahatma Gandhi personally took the effort to achieve the change that he wanted to see. It is of course too much to expect our present day leaders to go around the cities with their rising number of slums, and initiate a genuine drive to clean-up the surrounding. It is even less probable that they will pull themselves away from their market-focused pursuits and ineffectual, exclusive pursuit of GDP growth, to focus on the task of nation-building. Teachers and students role is very important to create awareness on cleanliness. In to day's world the role of social media is important to create awareness among the people and inculcate a feeling of nationality among them. Cleanliness is not only the responsibility of the '*safaai kaamgar*' (sanitation worker) or local

government. It is the responsibility of all Indians. It is the responsibility of the Government officers, NGOs and the local community to make India completely clean, all the people should actively participate to clean India to fulfill the dream of Mahatma Gandhi for the protection of the environment, for our safety, and for a healthy future.

Gandhi views on ecology:

His ideas were expressed in terms of two fundamental laws: Cosmic law and the Law of Species. Cosmic Law views the entire universe as a single entity. Nothing could malfunction outside the threshold limits built into the grand system that includes both living and non-living phenomena. He believed that "the universe was structured and informed by the cosmic spirit, that all men, all life and indeed all creation were one". He was an advaitist who believed in the essential unity of man and nature. He wrote: "I believe in the advaita (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the world gains with him and if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent." Regarding the law of species Gandhi believed that without the cooperation and sacrifice of both human and non-human beings evolution is not possible. Being rational human beings, we are the custodians of the rest of creation and should respect their rights and cherish the diversity. It is for this reason that taking more than the required resources is seen as theft.

Gandhi's Non-violence in environmental protection: Truth and nonviolence are the fundamentals of Gandhian philosophy. His life itself was a relentless



search for truth. His views on truth are embedded in his religious beliefs and practices and offer "a cosmological view of our relationship with one another and a pervasive sense of duty we owe to one another." Nonviolence or Ahimsa means non-injury, but to Gandhi nonviolence was much more than the absence of violence. He used it to mean non-injury in thought, word and deed. He viewed nonviolence as the philosophy of life. Truth and Ahimsa are intertwined terms. To Gandhi truth is that "which determines the spirit in which one lives or the religious and ethical criteria which govern the way in which he thinks and acts." He believed that truth can be achieved only by means of nonviolence. It affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour. If truth is the highest law, then nonviolence is the highest duty. Gandhi claimed that truth was the most correct and fully significant term that could be used for God. To practice Ahimsa is to realise truth and to realise truth is to practice Ahimsa.

Gandhi and the Deep Ecology:

The "deep ecology"¹ and the conservation of mother earth have become the catchwords for environmentalists all over the world. It is interesting to note that Arne Naess, who coined the term 'deep ecology', has acknowledged his indebtedness to Gandhi in the formulation of this term. Many

environmentalists acknowledge their debt to Gandhi in understanding the problem from a holistic perspective. In Gandhi's life time, ecological and environmental issues were not matters of serious discussion as now. But Gandhi was deeply concerned about the damages done by modern industrial civilization to the environment which he portrayed in his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* written in 1909.

Gandhi has not built up any theory of environmental philosophy or system which strictly falls within the scheme of present environmental science. Gandhi was deeply concerned with all problems confronted by humanity, and it was quite natural that he expressed his concern on matters relating to ecology and environment. One who scrutinises Gandhi's speeches and writings will be amazed by the deep eco-consciousness rooted in his philosophy of life. Eco-consciousness embedded in Gandhi's Philosophy of life and Worldview Gandhian environmental ethics stems from his philosophy of life and his worldview. In the Gandhian world view, human life cannot be divided into watertight compartments such as economic, political, and religious and so on. Human life is an undivided whole. He believed that "One's everyday life was never capable of being separated from his spiritual being. Both acted and reacted upon one another." He believed in the unity and oneness of all life and its interconnectedness. This relational worldview is equally applicable to animal and plant life. He wrote, "I do not believe that an individual may gain spiritually and those that surround him suffer. I believe in advaita. I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I

¹ Deep ecology's core principle is the belief that the living environment as a whole should be respected and regarded as having certain inalienable legal rights to live and flourish, independent of its utilitarian instrumental benefits for human use.



believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent."

Gandhi's Sarvodaya in Environmental Protection:

Unity and oneness of life is the crux of Sarvodaya² ideology which can be considered as the underpinning of deep environmental philosophy. Gandhi's philosophy of Sarvodaya is based on the principle of wellbeing of all human as well as sentient beings. Gandhi wrote in the last chapter of his Autobiography "To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest creation as oneself." In the Sarvodaya society of Gandhi's vision, the organization of the society must be based on the Law of Non-violence or Love.

Gandhi had profound concern for nature and all living beings including plants and animal kingdom. He led a life which was essentially non-violent giving due respect to nature and its creations. There are many telling passages in Gandhi's life which show his commitment for environmental protection. Let us cite an incident from his life. It was painful for Gandhi to see large numbers of leaves plucked at night for him while only few were necessary. He lamented, "Trees are living beings just like us. They live and breathe, they feed and drink as we do and like us they need sleep. It is a wretched thing to go and tear the leaves of a tree at night when it is resting! And why have you brought such a huge quantity? Only a few

² It means "Happiness of all" which includes all living things.

leaves were necessary.... We should feel a more living bond between ourselves and the rest of the animate creation."

Gandhi's Trusteeship in Environmental Protection:

According to Gandhi, "A seeker of the Truth, a follower of the law of Love cannot hold anything against tomorrow." Gandhi's ideal of Aparigraha calls for a giving up of all possessions. Gandhi had given a new meaning to the verse in Isha Upanishad - tena-tyaktenabhunjeethah (enjoy the wealth by renouncing it). He said "Earn your crores by all means but understand that your wealth is not yours; it belongs to the people. Take what you require for your legitimate needs and use the remainder for society." It calls for the application of doctrine of trusteeship and everyone should use the resources of nature with a sense of aparigraha for the common welfare of the people. The sarvodaya society which Gandhi visualised is free from undue exploitation of nature. In such a society everyone has to perform Yajna³ to lead an ideal life in tune with nature trying to return whatever he or she takes from nature.

³ Gandhi explains his concept of Yajna as follows: "Yajna means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in the widest sense, and includes thoughts and word as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life..... Yajna having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus forever bound to serve the universe."



He made a conscious effort to use the resources of nature to the bare minimum in an attempt to conserve natural resources even if it is available in abundance. His attitude was that one should not take even a single thing from nature when it is not actually required. Gandhi placed before humanity a lifestyle which was in tune with the environment. The application of Gandhian principles will allow human beings to satisfy their basic needs without harming interests of fellow beings. Gandhi stated that "the earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed." This well-known dictum of Gandhi reminds us that man cannot infinitely exploit nature to satisfy his unlimited wants. Gandhi's philosophy of life provides a sustainable development paradigm which is symbiotic with nature and ecosystem.

Conclusion:

Several decades before the rise of environmental movements, Gandhi picked up fundamental environmental issues like over-consumption, violence to man and nature and so on. There are several movements in different parts of the globe fighting against environmental injustice. Some of them are violent in nature, but in India environmental movements have been forged by Gandhian traditions of non-cooperation and non-violence. Gandhi is not environmentalists who will analyse the causes and consequences of depletion in the ozone layer. He is not competent to recommend measures against environmental pollutions and safeguards against all kinds of environmental hazards. He belongs to the school which believes in remedy rather than cure. Throughout his life he kept on telling

people and giving demonstration on health, hygiene and sanitation. Hardly any political leader of his stature in the world had ever devoted so much of time and energy on these problems with so much sincerity and dedication. Gandhi tried to carry the message to the mass through the life he himself led. This is what made him an environmentalist with a difference.

"It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures"

.---The Constitution of India

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